

GOVERNOR JANET NAPOLITANO
STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESS
48TH ARIZONA LEGISLATURE
SECOND REGULAR SESSION
JANUARY 14, 2008

[EXCERPT ON EDUCATION]

I believe education is the most important chapter for our future. Look where we stood just five years ago. There was no plan to give Arizona's children the early start they need and deserve. Teacher pay was lagging, and we weren't doing what was necessary to support our new teachers and keep our best educators in the classroom. Phoenix was the largest city in the nation without a university-based medical school and our state was not graduating enough students with college degrees to keep up with our growth.

Fast-forward to today. We've created a new grade level by making full-day kindergarten available to every Arizona family. We've made historic investments in early childhood education and in teacher pay. We've broken ground on an all-new medical campus, tripled our contribution to student financial aid, and built up our universities.

This is progress, and it is precisely where we needed to go.

Now, we must move quickly – this year – to implement the voter-approved initiative aimed at early childhood. Beginning with our youngest children, we must focus on preschool and quality child care, so that children are fully prepared for the all-day kindergarten we now provide.

For older students, we set the tone last month when the State Board of Education raised expectations and standards to require more math and science in high school. I believe – and our educators believe – these new standards are key to what must be the central goal of an Arizona education: giving our students the skills they need to succeed in the high-tech, high-knowledge world of the 21st century.

And now that we've changed the graduation standards, tests need to be changed to match. For example, students now will have had four years of math, taking them to the Algebra II level. It makes no sense to test them to a level they completed two years earlier.

So we need to look at everything – including AIMS – to make sure we're testing for the right things, at the right times, and for the right reasons.

It's also time to end the fiction that a high school diploma is the final goal of education or that a student should be allowed to drop out at the age of 16. An Arizona diploma should demonstrate that a student is fully prepared for higher education, whether in a technical or vocational setting, a community college, or a university. Yes, we should make reasonable alternatives available for students who can't succeed in a regular classroom. And the dropout age should be raised to 18 years old.

Higher standards for students mean we must sustain a higher-quality corps of math and science teachers by expanding teacher loan forgiveness, scholarships, and incentives. Last year, you took a big step in this direction by providing initial funding for these incentives, and by funding more math and science teachers; I ask you to do the same this year.

We've added rigor to the curriculum and raised expectations. But high standards must come with strong support, which you should provide; and we must also reward our students when they succeed.

Given our budget constraints, we cannot do as much – immediately – as we would like. But we can look to the future. The eighth graders of today are the high school class of 2012 – Arizona's centennial class. I say, let's make a contract with these *Centennial Scholars*, and with all the classes that follow. Let's agree that any eighth grader who pledges to stay out of trouble and maintains at least a "B" average in high school will be guaranteed free tuition at any of our community colleges or state universities. Let's act now for the class of 2012, and for every class thereafter, because the promise of these *Centennial Scholars* is the promise of Arizona's next 100 years.

Rewarding students who are excelling is a good step, but we must recognize that higher education is something that all Arizona children will need to succeed. It's a pathway to prosperity and, in Arizona, it's also supposed to be affordable. I propose that, beginning next year, all Arizona universities guarantee that when a student begins college, his or her tuition will not be raised for four years – period. Times change and tuition will rise, but it shouldn't go up once you've started your coursework. Call it a "fixed-rate" loan on the best investment we can make in Arizona's future – our children.

We also need to educate and train more health care professionals. To achieve that end, the new university medical campus in Phoenix, which will bring more doctors, nurses, pharmacists and other health care professionals to Arizona, is paramount. My budget asks you to authorize the funding necessary for this project, which will make Arizona a world leader in cutting-edge medical education and health care.

While we invest in these medical degrees, let's remember that Arizona has to increase the number of students who earn bachelor's degrees.

In the past five years, that number has grown, and our community colleges are granting associate degrees at a very competitive rate. But we need to do more. I call on our higher education institutions to work together and double the number of bachelor's degrees they produce by the year 2020. To do this, our universities have to increase graduation rates, retain more students, create more options for students in rural areas, enroll more first-generation students, and boost the number of students coming from community colleges. This Legislature needs to support them now in these critical tasks.

Before I leave this chapter on education, I will remind you of a critically important fact: 15 percent of students come from families that do not speak English. These students must learn to

read, write and speak in English as soon as possible. I put this challenge to legislative leadership: take our tax dollars out of court and put them back in the classroom, where they belong.

Our education system is linked to the needs of Arizona's economic future. There is no separation. We need more teachers. We need more engineers, scientists, urban planners, water specialists and entrepreneurs. We have worked ardently, from preschool to community college and university, to increase the quality of an Arizona education, and then to align education as a whole to the needs of Arizona's economy. We are still writing the education chapter of our Arizona story, but the direction we have taken is the right one.

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